

February 25, 2015

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and honorable members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Caitlin Sorge, and I am the Director of Sexual Assault Crisis Service (SACS) at the YWCA New Britain. Our program offers assistance to sexual assault survivors and their families. Our services include a 24-hour English and Spanish confidential hotline with immediate access to trained and certified counselors. We also provide individual crisis counseling, support groups, accompaniment through medical, police, and court procedures, campus advocacy, and prevention education. YWCA New Britain – SACS covers a 46-town region including all of Hartford county, part of Tolland county, and the town of Plymouth. Our program covers one of the largest territories in Connecticut. In 2014, we provided services to 730 sexual assault survivors.

Due to budget cuts and lack of funding over the years, YWCA New Britain – SACS has reduced our program staffing hours, which has created unique challenges for our program to meet the ever-growing needs of our community. Each full-time Advocate position has been reduced to 30 hours/part-time statuses. Our Community Educator position has been reduced to 20 hours weekly but is required to meet the prevention education needs of 46 towns. Our Campus Advocate has been reduced to 30 hours but is required to meet the campus outreach needs of 14 college campuses. Our Child and Adult Advocates have been reduced to 30 hours weekly but are meeting the recovery needs of survivors and their families. Our Advocates respond to the needs of those in the aftermath of trauma around the clock. To say that our work is emotionally and physically taxing is an understatement. Advocates deserve a livable wage and sufficient paid work hours.

YWCA New Britain – SACS is respectfully requesting the Appropriations Committee to leave the rape crisis line item fully funded. This line item was increased by \$200,000 last year for the first time in more than 20 years. Our program is rising to the challenge of supporting survivors and providing effective prevention programming to help end the prevalence of sexual assault in Connecticut. We know our work positively impacts and shapes the lives of survivors. YWCA New Britain – SACS evaluates our program through client questionnaires. We are proud to share the following outcomes:

- 100% of a random sampling of clients receiving hotline services stated they experienced a significant reduction in stress, were able to make informed decisions, and felt supported in their time of need.
- 86% of clients receiving a minimum of 6 counseling sessions reported they were able to understand the assault was not their fault, experienced a reduction in anxiety, were able to identify triggers, felt they could effectively cope and identify goals, and understood where to seek further support.
- 83% of clients receiving advocacy support reported feeling emotionally supported through the process, were satisfied with their role in the process, felt empowered to navigate the system (i.e. medical, law enforcement or legal), and were able to describe a plan for navigating the system in order to move forward in their recovery.
- 92% of clients receiving support group services reported a better ability to express feelings, felt more in control of their life, trusted their decisions more, increased self-esteem, and practiced more effective coping skills and healthy behaviors.

Sexual assault can harm survivors emotionally, psychologically, and physically. Common effects from sexual assault include Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, flashbacks, substance abuse, suicide, self-harm, and sexually transmitted infections. We know that when survivors are given support and advocacy in their recovery process they are able to manage these effects. YWCA New Britain – SACS remains committed in our mission to support survivors in our community.

for every woman

We look forward to continuing to meet the needs of Connecticut residents affected by sexual assault with your support and partnership.

Sincerely,

Caitlin Sorge, MSW

for every woman